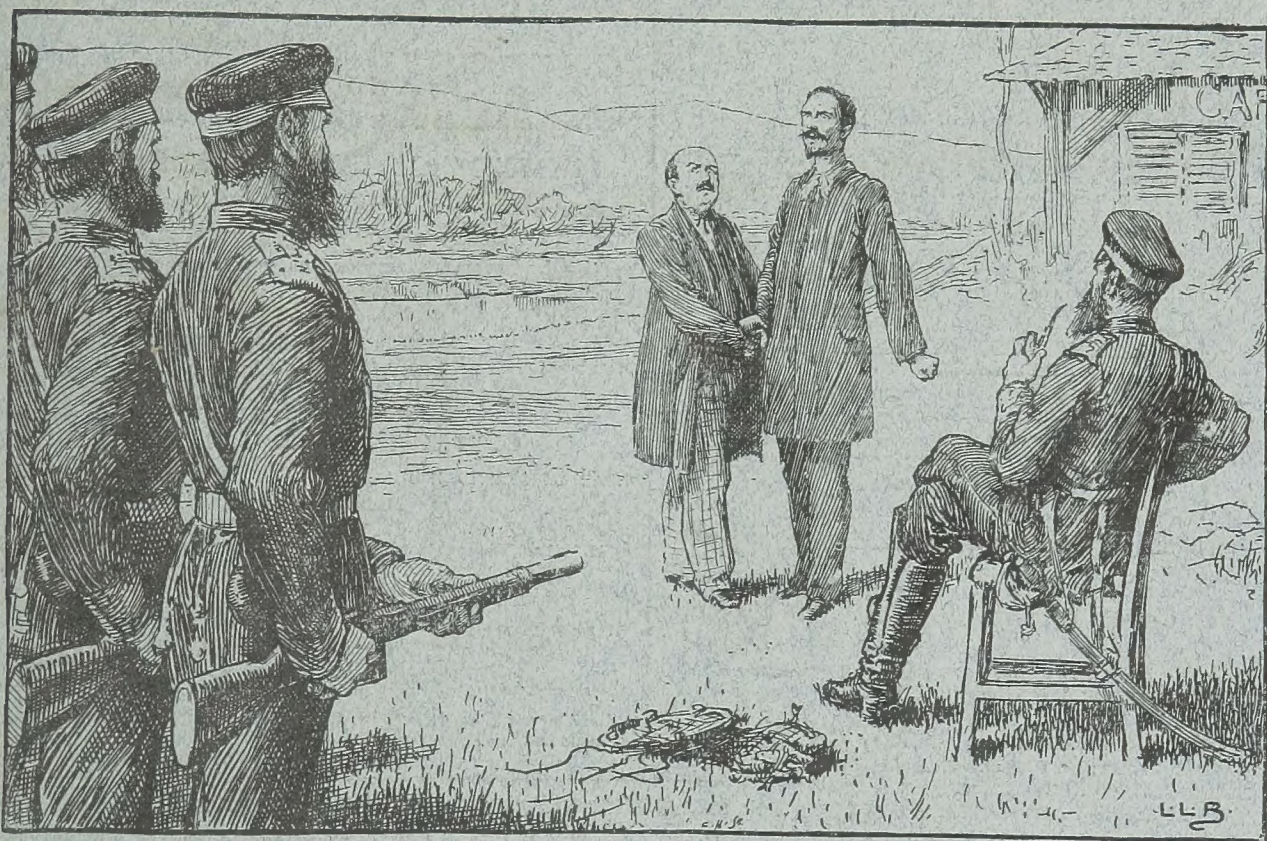


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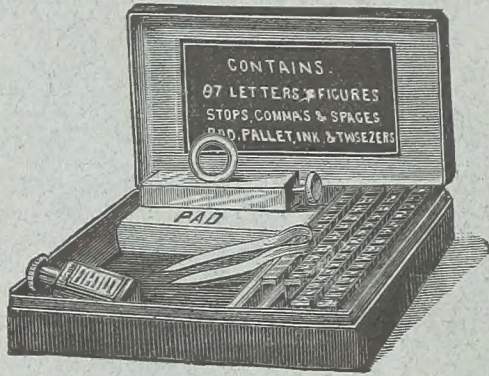
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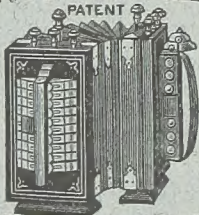
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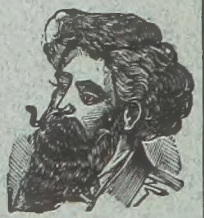
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Illustrated Penny Tales.

This Little Girl; or, Worked Out.

By Pleydell North.

Author of "Monsieur le Curé"; and other Tales.

THE heart of an English valley; a stretch of green slope, where oaks and elms had grown through slow centuries into grandeur; and through the fields, like an arrow of silver, the clear waters of the Lean.

Down by its banks a young girl, wandering alone, singing as she went, her white gown shining in the sunlight.

What was her song, I know not. Possibly it was the effort of a very young and sympathetic nature, seeking some faint expression for a sense of joy and beauty instinctively felt.

She thought she was alone; but presently above the high reeds she saw the head and shoulders of a solitary angler. Then she stopped singing and went on cautiously.

This young lady's chaperon was sitting up among the elms sketching. She had warned her charge not to wander too far away, and of the possibility of encountering strangers; some of the "all sorts of people"—tourists and wanderers—who were said in summer

to delight in fishing the waters of the Lean. There was that, however, in the shape of the head and shoulders, seen outlined against the sky, which attracted Miss Rawdon, and she did not turn back as she might have done.

She was very young, and the world promised to be a fairy tale, with always an impending transformation scene of entrancing possibilities. Only three weeks ago she had left school; the school-house at Norwood and the care of the two kindly Misses Lake, its mistresses, bounded all the horizon of her childish recollection. Now she was longing to come into touch with this world of wonders, the smallest incident of which promised an adventure.

When she reached a willow, half a field's length from the angler, she stopped. The trunk partly concealed her, and she could watch proceedings comfortably.

Nothing might have come of it. She might have returned to Mrs. Montresor sitting under the elms with no distinct increase of impression, beyond the outline of a hat and a pair of shoulders; but swish through the long grass came something—straight in her direction.

It was an Irish terrier, as keenly excursive as herself. He had caught sight of the white gleam behind the willow trunk, and, forgetful of his master and his master's interests, of all a dog's duty, he started to investigate its meaning.

"Back, Rollo—back, you beast!"

The call was imperative; but for once Rollo paid no heed. He had the bit of something white in his mouth in a trice; the next moment, with much sagacity, he was fawning and fondling the little hand laid upon his tawny coat.

Instinct told Miss Rawdon it would be better to come from behind her retreat; so she stood forth in the flicker of sunlight and shadow, a maiden revealed.

Her hat was in her hand, her brown hair was all tumbled and blown; the folds of her white gown hung simple and straight round her slight, lissom figure. She was young, and fair, and sweet, and the dog, fawning upon her, had nestled his muzzle in her hand.

The fisherman forgot the already startled fish; he left his line in the bushes and came towards her.

"Down, Rollo—down, you dog, you—"

Why do we love to picture the birth of the greatest joy which earth has to give out in the open, where the wind comes laden with the songs of a thousand birds, the scents of a million flowers that have lived and loved and died? For the sake of our poor humanity, let us still think that to love purely is to draw nearer to God—is a step forward upon the way that shall lead to His disclosing. It is at the time of this awakening of our greatest capabilities for joy or sorrow that we are most willing to believe Him near—then, and at the time of that other awakening which we are apt to call death. In both cases the issues are so tremendous, the weakness



"A SOLITARY ANGLER."





"HER HAT WAS IN HER HAND."

of our finality turns outward, seeking help from the Infinite.

Like death, love is no respecter of persons, time, or place—he comes upon us when and how and where he wills ; but, if we may choose, let it be far from the jarring discords of the world, the flesh, and the devil—for one moment let us enter Eden, let us stand, pure, holy, unstained before God.

The fisherman had no idea that anything tremendous was happening to him as he stood, hat in hand, apologizing for his dog. Only the day had suddenly grown more fair, his heart younger, God nearer.

Ellinor thought, "What will Mrs. Montresor say? He is worth looking at." And she also felt happier; but in the meantime she must speak.

"Oh, it doesn't signify at all, thank you," looking at her soiled gown; "I love dogs, but I am afraid I have spoiled your sport."

"I have had none to-day—the sun is too bright."

The dog had by this time retreated to his master, and Ellinor felt that she must make a move in the direction of her chaperon.

"My friend is up there," she said, pointing vaguely in the direction of the trees, "and I must go back to her. I hope you will have better sport—though not a change of weather," she added, laughing gaily, "for the sake of our luncheon."

She turned away ; but to lose her just then was not within the calculations of the fisherman.

"Forgive me," he said, with an air of profound anxiety, "but there is a bull up there on the hill. He is, I know, apt to take umbrage at strangers—in fact, he belongs to Sir Arthur, my father. If you will allow us, Rollo and I will see you safely over the bridge."

A mild herd were grazing on the hill. They showed no signs of ferocity ; but it was impossible to say where the bull might be hiding. And why should this pleasant-mannered person tell a story ?

She felt rather amused. The first young man to whom she had spoken, and, lo, he was walking composedly at her side !

"Is this land your father's? I hope we are not trespassing?"

"Oh, dear, no—no end of people come here to sketch the ruins."

"I am Miss Rawdon, of Firholt," said Ellinor, a little stiffly. She did not care to be confounded with "no end of people."

"Oh," he said, eagerly, "I know. Your father has bought that property—a splendid property it is, too."

"I am expecting my father to-night."

"That's jolly for you," he said, sympathizingly. "At least, I suppose it is."

She looked at him gravely. How was it that she felt she could say to this stranger what was in her heart? "Is it not strange?" she said, almost below her breath. "I have never seen him—that I can remember. I have been at school all these years, and he has been in America."

"Well, that *is* rather a stunner—to drop all at once into a parent when you are full grown ; but I expect it will be all right."

He smiled at her so kindly that the commonplace words seemed the deepest sympathy. By this time she had taken his image with some clearness into her mind, as she never again quite lost it. A tall, well-made man of thirty, with kind, grey eyes that smiled pleasantly ; a broad and rather high forehead, where the hair already grew a little thin about the temples. The rest of the features were straight and finely cut ; the chin slightly pointed.

"Somebody would have liked to paint him," she thought ; "one of those old men—Velasquez or Rembrandt."

They had reached the bridge, and the vision of Mrs. Montresor, standing up and looking for her charge, presented itself. Catching sight of her in her present alarming vicinity, she hurried forward.

"There is my friend," said Ellinor, "Mrs. Montresor. Will you come and be introduced to her?"

She felt pleased at the consternation visible on her guardian's face as she drew near.

"This is Mr. Peyton, Mrs. Montresor ; he has kindly protected me from a ferocious bull in the other field. It seems we are upon Sir Arthur Peyton's ground."

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Peyton ; but you should not have wandered so far away, Ellinor, and you are quite heated. Come and sit down."

"I hear you have been drawing the ruins. I dabble in colour a little myself," said Peyton. He seemed to have no intention of leaving. He went back with them to the shade of the elm trees, and stayed chatting, directing most of his conversation to Mrs. Montresor, until Jacky (the page) appeared with the luncheon basket, prompted by his own inner cravings. Then at last Mr. Peyton remembered the claims of his fishing tackle. He held Ellinor's hand for a moment as he said farewell.

"I hope we may soon meet again," he said. "My mother has been meaning to call upon you ; but she has scarcely been able to leave the house for some weeks."

When he was gone they spread the snowy cloth upon the grass, and such a collation as women love, cold chicken, and a fresh young lettuce, a bottle of Sauterne, and crisp pastry sheltering green gooseberries.

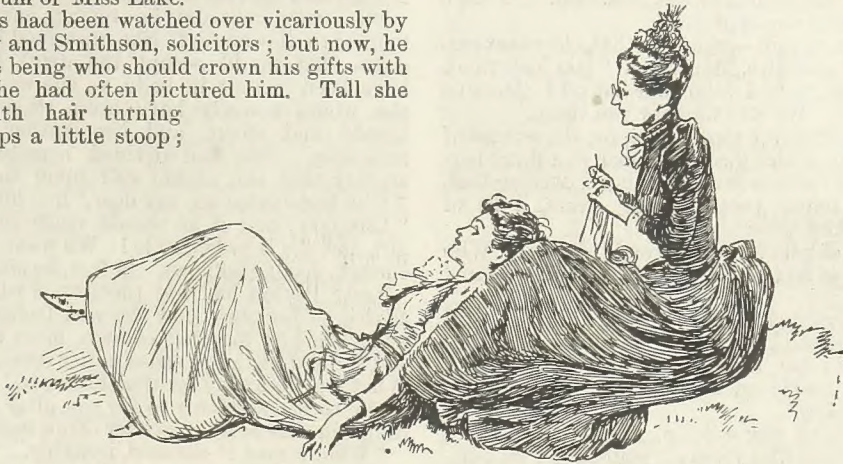
Afterwards Ellinor lay with her head resting against Mrs. Montresor's knee, gazing up through the trellis-work of green to the blue depths beyond. She dreamed peacefully a vague, fanciful dream, half pleasant retrospect, half anticipation. She felt that her morning's encounter had broken the isolation of her life. Strange that it should happen upon this day, of all others ; for its close was to reveal to her one near link with her kind—the unknown father who yet had shaped her destiny. Miss Rawdon was distinctly an heiress, the sum of her expectations had been vaguely hinted at as

nearly half a million. She had stepped from her school life to this glorious independence; to be mistress of Firholt, "the place in Hampshire" bought and fitted up for her reception. And the royal giver of all this was her father, known only through letters delivered to her through the medium of Miss Lake.

Her school days had been watched over vicariously by Messrs. Ridgway and Smithson, solicitors; but now, he was coming—the being who should crown his gifts with his presence. She had often pictured him. Tall she fancied him, with hair turning iron grey; perhaps a little stoop;

"Is this," he said, "is this my little girl?" She lifted her head and blushed. Was it for him, or for her thoughts of him?

"Yes, father, I am Ellinor."



"SHE LAY WITH HER HEAD RESTING AGAINST MRS. MONTRESOR'S KNEE."

tired from the toil of the years in which he had amassed the wealth which he was coming to share with his little girl. That was the name he gave her in his letters. Short letters they had been, explaining little, but often repeating his desire that she should fully qualify herself for the position it would be hers to fill—telling her that all the hopes and desires of the writer's heart were centred upon his little girl, and that he was always "her affectionate father, Matthew Rawdon."

To-day her dreams were clearer than ever. They seemed a very foreshadowing of his presence. It was the restlessness of expectation which had drawn her to persuade Mrs. Montresor to come out to spend these last hours in the open fields.

It was nearly five o'clock when they started on their homeward drive. On reaching Firholt they were met by the house-keeper with the news that Mr. Rawdon had already arrived—two hours before his time. Ellinor waited for no comment, she flew up the steps, and across the hall to the small drawing-room where, she was told, he was awaiting her. An older woman would have paused—tried to prepare herself for the meeting—Ellinor thought only of the end of suspense. She threw open the door.

He had seen the carriage drive up, heard her coming; he was standing in the middle of the room awaiting her.

"Father!" then she stopped short.

Was this he—this her father? There must be some mistake. A small man stood there. His right hand held the wrist of his left, as if seeking support even from himself. One foot shuffled nervously over the other. His clothes hung loosely, and set badly. He was spare and thin; his scant hair was iron-grey and stubby, inclined to stand upright; his beard was stubbly also, and apparently of recent growth. Above all, he did not look a gentleman. He came forward and spoke. His voice was a redeeming point; it was soft and musical—coming from such a man, it was a surprise. So were his eyes, when he lifted them as he drew near. Habitually they were downcast. He came, leaving the custody of his own wrist, and rubbing his hands together.

He leant forward and kissed her brow—he had no occasion to stoop. As he did so, his eyes met hers. She saw them, wistful, pleading, as though asking forgiveness for she knew not what, perhaps for his presence. Her heart reproached her; everything was his, even herself. It was a relief when Mrs. Montresor came in. If she felt surprise, she was too clever to show it, and her somewhat effusive greeting gave Ellinor time to recover herself. She gave her father his tea; he begged her to. His face lit up at every small office she performed for him. He watched her, he gloated over her, her freshness, her sweetness, her beauty.

"My little girl," he said to himself, more than once, hugging his own wrist.



"WAS THIS HER FATHER?"

Mrs. Montresor saw the strained look upon the girl's face, the trembling of her hands among the tea-cups. As soon as the function was over, she proposed to conduct Mr. Rawdon over his own house.

"Messrs. Ridgway and Smithson were so good as to consult me about the arrangements," she said. "I hope they will meet with your approval."

"Sure to do that, ma'am—sure to do that," he answered.

"Ellinor, dear," said Mrs. Montresor, "you look tired. Had you not better go and take your hat off? Meet us in the long gallery. We will wait for you there."

Ellinor was thankful for the respite, for the chance of solitude. In safety within her own room, she flung herself upon her bed; she was overwrought, over-excited, and her dismay found vent in ready tears, a fit of childish, heartbroken sobbing.

"What should she do? What should she do? Who was he? What was he? And the Peytons were coming to call!"

Then, the fit of crying over, and being a child still, and simple in her ways, she knelt beside the bed, and prayed for strength to do her duty. When Mrs. Montresor came to seek her nearly an hour later, she was sitting calmly by the window.

"You should have come down, Ellinor," she said, busying herself about the room; "your father was disappointed."

"I was very tired, dear Monty. I am sorry."

There was a quiet, constrained tone in the young voice that was new to it. Mrs. Montresor was a good woman, but of coarser stuff than her charge. She went over to her side. "Tut, dear child—don't fret—he has kind eyes—you must take care of him—£300,000—he's a prince compared to many a man I've seen fêted for half the money."

Ellinor drew back a little.

"It is time to dress for dinner," she said. "I mustn't vex my father by being late. Is he gone to his room?"

Instinct had revealed to her her lesson. There was a burden she must stoop to carry, but to the world she must walk upright.

With curious consistency she chose the handsomest dinner dress in her wardrobe for her toilette; one which she had put aside as unfitting her years. The train and bodice were of grey velvet, falling open in front over a petticoat of brocade and old lace. Indeed, it was better suited for a woman of forty; but, when her maid had gathered her hair into a tight knot on the top of her little head, and she had fastened a great bunch of roses in her bosom, she looked a quaint and dainty lady, and moved with a newly born dignity pretty to see. She glanced at herself in the pier-glass. "Had it been different," she thought, "I could have put on my white gown. I could have remained young. Now I see why he educated me; I must make it up to him."

He was waiting for her in the large drawing-room; not in evening dress, but wearing a loose black coat and white waistcoat. He looked at her with pride, almost with awe, as, her head held high, she swept into the room. The dinner passed off better than she had hoped. She noted that he was cautious and quick of observation. He watched her and Mrs. Montresor from beneath his eyelids, and followed their lead; also he talked little.

Mrs. Montresor was right in her prediction that the county would call. Before Mr. Rawdon had been a fortnight at Firholt the carriages began to roll up the drive with considerable frequency. Ellinor took her line. She was a little on the defensive, dignified, very quiet, defying criticism. In the daytime she dressed with marked plainness, in the evenings with marked splendour. It was wonderful when the girl had learnt that she could no longer afford to be childish.

Among the first comers were the Peytons; Guy, with his mother. Sir Arthur was laid up with the gout. The visit was not altogether a success. Mr. Rawdon was at home, and there were no other visitors. He always struck strangers in the light of a surprise. He stood in

front of Lady Peyton, clasping and unclasping his wrist, shuffling his feet, replying in short, jerky sentences to her efforts at conversation, and calling her "Ma'am." Guy, after the first shock, was constrained and polite; a different man from the pleasant stranger Ellinor had chatted to in the fields.

She wondered, did he repent having brought his mother to the house? She imagined bitterly the criticisms that would occupy the drive home—could she have been present in body, as she was in imagination, she would scarcely have been reassured. Guy was moody and silent, and his mother looked at him anxiously. She had divined something beneath his anxiety that she should call upon these new people. "You had better go, my dear," her husband had said; "£300,000! and if he should really take a fancy to the girl, and she is presentable! We want the money badly enough, goodness knows. In fact, he *must* marry money."

Lady Peyton had not thought it wise to repeat this advice to her son; now she was feeling very much put out. The girl was well enough, more than presentable, and showed her good sense in her dress. But the man! What a price to pay for the old estate!

She turned suddenly to her son, after thinking of these things in silence for a quarter of an hour.

"What a man!" she said, irritably. "He is like some small City clerk on a hundred a year—a badger!"

"He might be worse," said Guy, nervously; "he might be obtrusive."

"I don't know that it would be worse. You would expect a man with nearly half a million of money to be assertive—but this creature—one asks, who can he be? How did he come by it? He hasn't the brain—he doesn't look one in the face—he is mean as well as low bred!"

It was seldom Lady Peyton spoke with so much vehemence; she was terribly put out, and she overshot the mark. The following day Guy again called at Firholt; rode over alone; he remembered a suggestion he wished to make to Mr. Rawdon about the fishing. He had thought over the situation; had weighed and justly appreciated the change in the girl which had perplexed him the day before, and thrown him out. He saw her determination not to be taken apart from her father, and it turned admiration into a serious and tender respect. He felt a chivalrous desire to atone to the girl who so bravely set herself to cast aside her frivolities and light-heartedness, and fight society with this terrible little man by her side.

He found Ellinor sitting under the brown beeches on the lawn. Mr. Rawdon was not at home, which, perhaps, was a relief to everyone concerned. Tea was brought out under the trees, and Mrs. Montresor came with her work. Perhaps the threatened destruction of an intercourse which had promised so much made its renewal sweeter. At any rate, from that afternoon the story of these two people ran with even facility to its climax. Guy Peyton asked Ellinor to be his wife in a simple, straightforward way about three months after their first meeting. Tragedy and parting seemed so far removed from their fate, when once the difficulty of her parentage was faced and accepted, that there was no occasion for much protestation. The undoubtingness of their love made it simple in expression; they knew that it dated from the day they had met by the Lean, and Rollo had effected their introduction. Sir Guy and Lady Peyton were forced into cordiality, for the dower offered by Mr. Rawdon was simply magnificent. The £300,000 proved no dream; it was solidly invested, and he proposed to settle almost the entire sum upon his daughter on her wedding-day, retaining only a sufficiency to supply the most simple needs. He also signified his intention of vacating Firholt for her use.

"Perhaps," he said, gently, "he would visit her occasionally—for himself rooms in town would be more to his taste." He explained this to Sir Arthur, who felt compelled to remonstrate, although secretly he thought the arrangement in every way admirable. Lady Peyton was exultant. With Mr. Rawdon's withdrawal, the

one fatal drawback to the marriage was removed. But Matthew Rawdon said nothing of his plans to his daughter.

It was within a few months of the date fixed for the wedding that a great dinner was given at Firholt. At the last moment a note arrived from Lady Peyton ; could Ellinor find room at the table for a friend, an American on a visit to Europe, who had appeared suddenly at the Hall, bringing letters of introduction impossible to neglect ?

They were among the last to arrive. Ellinor was receiving to-night in the great drawing-room, and she looked fit to reign there. She wore a dress trimmed with golden-hued chiffons. Across her bosom and on the skirt were sprays of daisies, and the heart of every daisy was a blazing sapphire—a type of the girl's nature she was totally unaware of.

Her father had taken up his favourite position with his back to one of the fireplaces, and she stood near him. Mr. Rawdon had improved during the last few months. He shuffled less ; his clothes, thanks to Ellinor, were irreproachable, and especially, since his daughter's engagement, he had grown daily more calm.

The Peytons were announced.

Sir Arthur and Lady Peyton, Mr. Peyton, and Mr. — ; the name was lost.

Ellinor saw a spare, tall man, keen-faced and vigilant. He was bowing before her. She heard a slow, slightly nasal monotone beginning :—

"I must apologize, Miss Rawdon—" He had reached the slight elevation of the last syllable, when an irresistible impulse made her turn from him to her father.

Matthew Rawdon had grown deadly pale. He had leant back against the mantel, clutching himself nervously.

"Father !"

He gave a swift motion of the hand, bidding her be still, and with an effort recovered himself.

A moment later she heard again the American's voice.

"You have a fine place here, Mr. Rawdon, one of the finest I *should* say in this fine country."

After the ladies had gone, the American had the field to himself. His metallic bell gradually silenced the other men, and he got the ear of the table.

Mr. Rawdon's chief merits as a host were that he gave good wine, good dinners, and left his guests entire freedom. He usually headed the table in silence, with the result that, on the present occasion, his white, exhausted face escaped remark, except from Guy Peyton. Matthew Rawdon had now something more than toleration from his future son-in-law—partly on Ellinor's account, partly on his own.

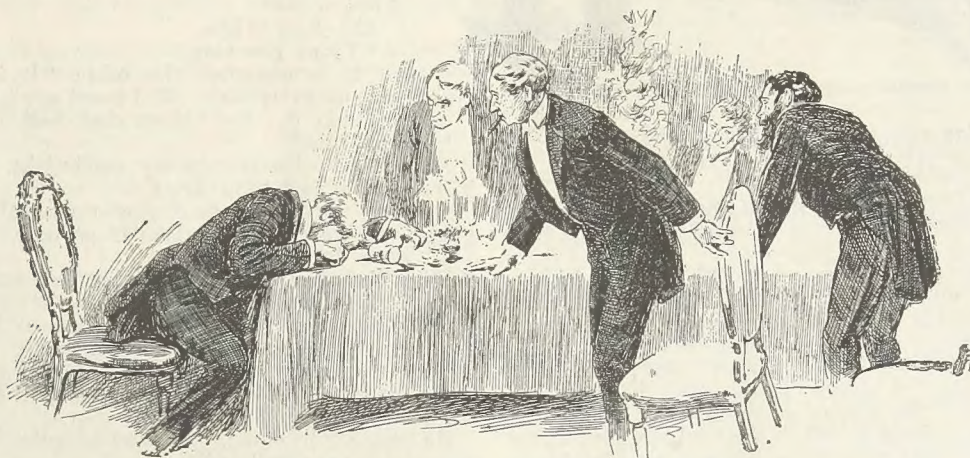
The unobtrusive self-effacement of the little man appealed strongly to those who came within his immediate influence.

The American was dilating on the fortunes made and lost on the other side of the Atlantic.

"A curious case," he was saying, "a curious case I knew once—a poor, wretched little clerk in an office in Boston city—he had a wife and child and one hundred and fifty pounds a year. One fine day he presented a cheque at a bank, signed by one of the best-known names in the city—a cheque for three hundred dollars. The cheque was a forgery, sir—a forgery ! The man was caught, trying to escape to Europe, and sent to prison. He had been speculating, gambling—buying small shares out of petty economies ; everything failed. When he had no more, he forged a name. Poor little chap, he threw himself at the feet of the man he had wronged and begged for mercy ; but he went to the hulks—his wife died of a broken heart.

"Now, sir, for the re-markable point. While that man was serving his time, some darned sentimental fool died, and left him every penny of his colossal fortune. His time served out, the man went to Europe, where he was unknown, to spend his money. When I saw him again, sir, he was about to ally himself, through his daughter, to one of the oldest and proudest families of this proud old country. He had changed two letters of his name. The name of the clerk, sir, was Daw—"

There was a sound as of a blow, a clatter of silver and glass. The host had fallen forward in his chair ; his body lay across the table, the arms stretched out.



"THE HOST HAD FALLEN FORWARD IN HIS CHAIR."

Her father made some inaudible reply ; the curious pallor was still upon his face, but dinner was announced ; she had no chance of speaking to him. During dinner she watched him anxiously. She saw that he was more than usually nervous ; that he drank a good deal of wine. Once or twice she caught a penetrating glance, swift and direct, thrown by the American to that end of the table.

Throughout she seemed to hear above every other sound the slight rise and fall of that slow, clear monotone, and felt she hated the man. It was a relief and reassuring to turn her head and catch Guy's smile, and she was thankful when she could give the signal for withdrawal.

"Where is my father ?"

Guy Peyton was by Ellinor's side in the drawing-room. Nearly half an hour had elapsed since the abrupt conclusion of the American's story. Mr. Rawdon had been carried from the table, but Guy had taken care that no rumour of alarm should reach Ellinor until he himself could go to her.

"He is not quite himself : he is in the library."

"What is the matter ? Why was I not told ? I must go to him."

"It is not serious. My father is with him. Don't go, Ellinor. It was a slight faintness, that is all. Don't

let people imagine anything has gone wrong. I asked Mrs. Montresor to go down."

"Are you sure? Would he rather I stayed here?"

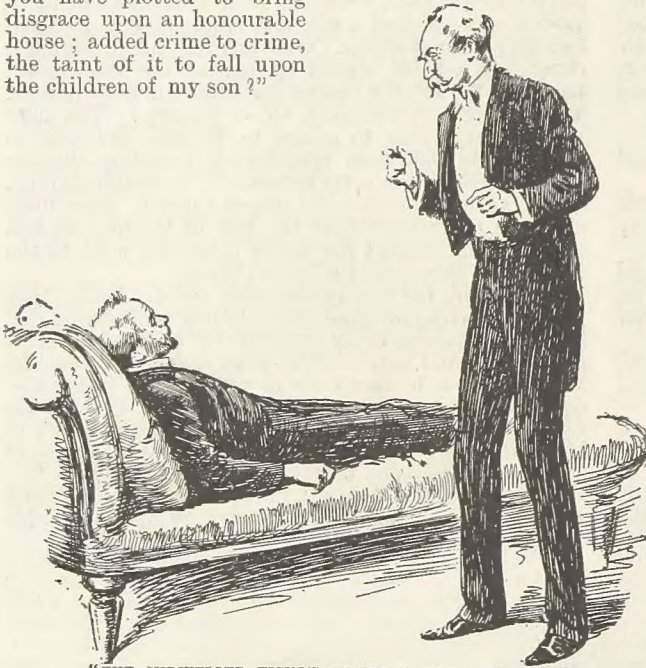
"I am quite sure he would rather you stayed here, and I also, Ellinor."

She obeyed him, but she was uneasy with foreboding, especially when Sir Arthur did not return, and longed to see the last of her guests, that she might be free.

In the library lay the master of Firholt. He had shrunk in this last hour. He was more wizened; his hands and feet seemed drawing themselves up into clothes that had suddenly grown loose and baggy; his face was livid, even to the lips. He lay with his eyes closed.

Sir Arthur Peyton was walking up and down the room, limping still from the gout, his face working; he was in a terrible passion.

"You own to it—that this man's story is true; that you have plotted to bring disgrace upon an honourable house; added crime to crime, the taint of it to fall upon the children of my son?"



"THE SHRIVELLED FIGURE ON THE COUCH TREMBLED."

The shrivelled figure on the couch trembled.

"I believed that it would never become known. I did it for her."

"Known or not known, the disgrace was there—the terrible disgrace! Good God! how can I tell what Guy will do? The exposure alone—"

"Must that exposure come?" said Mr. Rawdon, faintly.

"Come? Who is to prevent it?" said the man of title.

"The scandal will half kill Lady Peyton. To be sure, I have stopped that confounded American's mouth for the present. No one but he and myself know for certain."

A faint tinge of colour was coming back to Mr. Rawdon's face. He reached a cordial that was upon a table near, and drank it. Then he stood upright. There was a touch of dignity in his bent figure, his thin hands were folded quietly, his feet shuffled no more.

"Sir Arthur, when I forged that cheque, my wife was dying, and I had no money—none. I had begged five pounds from the father of the man who dined at my table to-day, and he refused it; then I used his name. Now I am going to beg once more—for my daughter—for Ellinor. Stop this thing from becoming public; save her from knowing. It will be better for you, too; and I—I will go to-night. I cannot stay here. I will write to her—telling her that the love of the old roving life is upon me—what you will. I cannot live long; I know it. The attack I had to-night was from the heart."

"And my son?"

"Tell him if you think it right; do as you like. Send

him abroad. I will tell Ellinor she must wait for my return, but let it fall upon her gradually—gently; do not break her heart."

There was something in the absolute simplicity of the man's pleading that touched Sir Arthur's heart—not an unkindly one; also the plan proposed seemed the best for them all. He did not know that Matthew Rawdon looked to the possibility that, with his self-effacement, his crime might be forgiven—to his little girl; that he hoped much from Guy's strength and Sir Arthur's need of that £300,000.

Sir Arthur hesitated. "I think," he said, slowly, at last, "it will be the best plan."

"You consent, then? You can assure this man's silence—"

"I consent. And as for Mr.—Mr. —, yes, I can silence him."

When at length Ellinor was rid of her guests, she went to seek her father. She found that he had gone to his room, and that the door was locked.

He answered back to her inquiries that he was better—anxious to sleep; she might go to bed without fear. She went back to Guy, who was waiting in the drawing-room. He had declined a seat in his mother's carriage, and meant to ride home. Ellinor slipped her arms about his neck:—

"Guy, what is the matter to-night? Something has happened, or is going to happen. What is it?"

He gathered her in his arms, crushing the chiffons of her yellow gown:—

"Nothing but your own nervous fears, sweet-heart."

"Guy, we have never talked much about our love. Tell me now how much you love me."

"An idle question, Nell. I love you, dear. If you were alone, and poor—"

"And dishonoured—say dishonoured, Guy."

He paused a moment, then said, quietly:—

"And dishonoured, Nell—outwardly; in your own pure heart you never could be—you are mine; the one woman for whom, by God's help, I live or die."

She clung to him.

"Thank you, Guy."

"It is nonsense," he said; "it is you who give me everything. If I loved you less I could not take it. You believe that, Nell?"

"Indeed, I do."

She lifted up her face to say good-night. Suddenly he caught her back to his arms.

"Oh, my love, my love, I almost wish these things might come upon you, that I might prove it."

When the quiet darkness of night had settled down upon Firholt, the door of its master's room opened softly. Treading as a thief in his own house, Mr. Rawdon stole out. He glided, a small, dark blot, through passages where a faint moonlight from time to time illuminated his shrinking figure, until he reached the door of his daughter's room.

He paused, listening. All was so quiet within, he ventured to turn the handle.

The stillness told him that Ellinor was asleep. Treading on tip-toe he stole across to the bed. There was sufficient light for him to see her face plainly, and, stooping over her, he kissed her lightly on the forehead—for the last time.

The poor little outcast was crying; a tear was rolling down his cheek, but he wiped it away, lest it should fall upon her and awaken her, following the light touch of his kiss. As it was she stirred a little in her sleep, and he drew back behind the curtain. He waited a few moments, then, without venturing to touch her again, he stole away out into the night. Early the next morning Mrs. Montresor came to Ellinor's room with a letter. She looked grave and anxious.



"MR. RAWDON STOLE OUT."

Matthew Rawdon had written to her, begging her to be herself the bearer of a letter to his daughter, and to break the news of his departure.

"How is my father?" asked Ellinor. "Has John been to him—have you heard?"

"Your father has been called away suddenly on business, dear child. He has written; here is his letter."

"What! without telling me? And he was so ill last night!"

Matthew Rawdon, in writing for the last time to his daughter, had characteristically avoided much self-expansion.

He spoke of his absence as necessary even for her own well-being, and begged her in the matter of her marriage to be guided by the wishes of Sir Arthur and Lady Peyton until his return.

Ellinor read his words in silence. She felt that some heavy blow had fallen, although as yet she could not realize its extent or nature; also, she was wounded and amazed. Her father had already formed his plans and discussed them with Sir Arthur when she bade him good-night at his door, and had said no word to her. It seemed that he had purposely avoided seeing her. Had she known of his secret farewell, her pain would have been less. She might have turned to Mrs. Montresor for comfort. Now she was silent and tearless.

She had scarcely left the breakfast-room when Lady Peyton arrived. Sir Arthur had taken his wife into his counsels, and she fully agreed in keeping such secrecy as might still be possible. It was a hard blow for her; the sense of shame, of having been duped, added to the disappointment, the overthrow of all her plans, made it almost unbearable.

She frankly expressed a wish that Mr. Rawdon or Dawson might never be heard of again—might put an end to himself—"It is the only thing left for the little wretch to do with any decency," she explained.

It was easy to induce the American to hold his tongue. He had done mischief enough already in satisfying a feeling of personal animosity. He had no wish to see the doors of a society he was eager to enter closed against him, as Sir Arthur assured him would infallibly be the case did he bring down further scandal upon his present hosts.

It was clear that the breaking off of the engagement

must come from Ellinor—there was no knowing what Guy's chivalrous notions might lead him into doing—and Lady Peyton drove over to Firholt in the morning, while her son thought her still in her room.

Her visit was a short one.

She entreated Ellinor for her own sake not to seek to know the reasons of her father's conduct; she told her that his last express wishes, left with Sir Arthur, had been that the marriage should be put off until his return, and implored her, for Guy's sake, to be guided by them.

"And his return—when will that be?" asked the girl, with blanched face.

"I—no one, I think, exactly knows."

"And it is for Guy's sake you ask me this?"

"Indeed it is—to save him from the consequences of a fatal mistake—from an irreparable wrong."

"And this mistake—it was my father's?"

"Yes."

Ellinor walked to the window. Was she to lose everything at one blow—father, lover—all that life held for her? "You are sure? This is best for Guy—is it to save him?" she asked again at last.

"I am quite sure."

The girl walked over to the writing-table without another word.

"You will know that my father has left me suddenly," she wrote. "I believe Sir Arthur and Lady Peyton know more of the cause than I—I learn that it is his wish that our marriage should be delayed until his return. No one knows when that will be. For your own sake I write to give you your freedom. I was mad to ask of you what I did last night—forget it, Guy. Do you think I am cold-hearted that I write so? I think I am dead—I can feel nothing."

When she had finished Lady Peyton was prepared to leave.

"I will send this," Ellinor said; "John shall ride over at once."

"You are a brave woman, Ellinor." She kissed the girl's cheek. It occurred to her that there were things even more potent than wealth to wipe out inherited stain.

Sir Arthur had purposely detained his son that morning, talking over matters totally unconnected with the topic uppermost in both minds. Guy had just escaped and was mounting to ride over to Firholt when Ellinor's letter was put into his hand. He was thunderstruck and furiously angry. Although perfectly aware that something had gone seriously wrong, he had waited, determined that his father should take the initiative, and equally determined that nothing should induce him to give up Ellinor. What he was not prepared for was that his mother should get the start of him, and deal the blow through the hand of his love. He went straight to Sir Arthur, the letter in his hand.

"You knew of this, sir? My mother has seen Ellinor this morning." The elder man felt uncomfortable. There was an unpleasant look of conspiracy about the affair; but Ellinor having proved reasonable, secrecy was no longer an object, and he told his son simply the whole story. Carefully as he detailed his own action in the matter, it was not difficult to read between the lines. The anger of the younger man deepened.

"Very well, sir," he said, when his father paused. "I more than half guessed the truth last night. In the face of it I renewed my word to Miss Rawdon. You have thought fit to hound away her father, to treat me like a child, and coerce Ellinor into breaking with me, working on her sense of honour. I can only say—if she will not marry me, I will marry no woman alive."

Then he took his hat and went out, over to Firholt. Ellinor came down to him, a haggard, white-faced woman.

"Ellinor, what do you mean——?"

"You know what I mean."

"Don't you know it is simply impossible to separate yourself from me?"

"You must not marry me."

"Nonsense, I mean to marry you."

She clasped her hands and rested the open palms upon his shoulder, looking into his face, her strained, tired eyes meeting his. "Guy, I must find him—find my father."

"Do you love him best?"

"No, but if I married you, even if your father and mother consented, if I could escape from doing you shameful injury, he would keep away, thinking that so we might be happy. I should have his long pain, perhaps his death, upon my heart."

"Dear love, I will find him; then we will go away together, he and you and I."

"No, no, it is impossible. Your mother would be heartbroken; and she trusts me."

"She did wrong to appeal to you. If we had been married, they must have accepted everything; there would have been no alternative, and it is the same thing."

"Guy, what has he done?"

"Nothing, love, that has not long ago been wiped out."

But Ellinor kept her word. Guy must go, and she would wait for her father's home-coming.

Guy also kept his word. He told her that he held himself bound, that he would seek Matthew Rawdon through the world and bring him back. In the meantime Ellinor refused to receive his letters or write to him.

The months went by, and Matthew Rawdon did not come, nor Guy. Lady Peyton and Sir Arthur began to console themselves with the thought that the little man must be dead, and to weary for their son. Ellinor advertised, sought the aid of a private inquiry office, all to no avail. She lived on quietly at Firholt with Mrs. Montresor, seldom going into society. She had grown into a grave, slightly reserved woman.

Every evening she went down to a path she loved, shadowed in spring by lilacs, laburnums, and guelder-roses; behind these a plantation of laurels. On the other side it was open to the park. She used to fancy that some evening in the dusk her waiting would be ended, and she should see her father coming.

After two years someone came; not her father, but Guy.

He had been to the house first, and took her unawares. Until she saw him, she did not know the exceeding bitterness of her loneliness and longing; she stretched out her arms with a cry.

"Sweetheart," he said, presently, "there must be no more parting between you and me. My people can't stand out any longer—the loneliness of the old place has proved too much for them. I will not stay here without you, and they are ready to welcome you."

"But my father—if he came back, would they welcome him? And, until he does, how can I break my word?"

"Listen, love—they think, we all think—Nell, I have tried every means to find him, and failed." There was a rustling among the laurel leaves. "It is only a bird," said Guy, feeling that she started.

"You think," she almost whispered, "that he is—dead?—without saying good-bye—without a word to me? Oh, Guy, whatever he has done, I loved him. How can I be happy in the fruit of his pain—to die deserted and alone?"

He tried to comfort her. Would not the greatest wish, the one keen desire of the lost man's heart be fulfilled if she were beloved and happy?

Together they walked towards the house; when they were out of sight the laurels rustled once more, and in the dusk there crept out a small, dark figure, unshaven, ragged, and forlorn. A beggar, surely! And the beggar knelt and kissed the dust which the young girl's feet had trodden.

In the morning one of the gardeners came up to the



"IN THE DUSK THERE CREPT OUT A SMALL, DARK FIGURE."

house with a grave face, and asked to see Mrs. Montresor.

"If you please, ma'am, there's a man, a tramp, he looks like; a poor, half-starved creature, he's lying dead among the laurels down by the shrubby walk."

"Good God! The poor man! Who can he be?"

The man's face was working; he was twirling his cap in his hands. He leaned forward and whispered:—

"Ma'am, I think, I al—most think—it's the master, Mr. Rawdon."

So for the second time the master of Firholt came home.

They carried the small, light figure to the house, to his own room, a strange contrast to its luxurious fittings.

There Ellinor went to him, and shut the door.

"Father! father! Oh, why will you not speak to me? Say once more, 'My little girl.'"

But Matthew Rawdon, the forger, would never speak again. Medical examination showed that he had been dead for many hours, the immediate cause of death being an old and deeply-seated heart disease, increased by suffering and want. He seemed to have been leading the life of a vagrant, but how and where he had succeeded in so completely hiding himself never came to light. The story of his death was hushed up, as had been that of his crime. Lady Peyton carefully talked of him as "highly eccentric," and explained that it was entirely owing to his eccentricity that her son's marriage had been postponed. The odd little man had started off in such an unaccountable manner, and Ellinor had been so resolute in abiding by his wish that she should await his return.

Well, he had come, and he was dead, and there was an end of it. No one had much interest in ferreting out the truth of his story. When the days of her mourning were ended, Ellinor married very quietly.

Sometimes in the summer evenings she takes her children to her father's grave, hoping that he is in some way conscious of the fidelity of her recollection.

She knows what was his crime—surely long ago worked out—and prays that its shadow may never fall upon those she loves.

Professor Morgan's Romance.

By Kate Lee.



“ AN ISOLATED HOUSE AND AN ISOLATED LIFE.”

PROFESSOR MORGAN was an antiquarian and archæologist. He loved things that were old and things that had been long dead, and passed all his days among bones and stones and ponderous books. Nothing fresh and living played any part in his life, and he persistently withdrew himself from intercourse with his fellows. His prematurely bald head, his large, bumpy forehead, and the studious stoop of his shoulders made him appear much older than he really was, and superficial observers imagined him to be as hard and as incapable of emotion as one of his own fossils. It was a rare thing for anyone to get a look from the grey eyes half hidden under the prominent brows. To those who by chance did obtain a full, direct glance from them, and who had the wit to read them aright, they were a revelation of the man. They were eyes that spoke, and the intensity of expression concentrated in them gave the lie to his otherwise emotionless aspect. The Professor was, in fact, no fossil. His heart could beat warm and quick, and a romance lay hidden under his outer husk of hardness and reserve.

Ten years ago Hugh Morgan, solitary, unknown, embittered in spirit and broken of heart, had come from abroad and taken up his residence in a lonely house fronting the sea on the outskirts of a Welsh sea-coast village. It seemed an abode as congenial as could possibly be found. The neighbourhood for many miles round abounded in antiquarian remains, and the house itself had looked out on the Atlantic for three centuries or more. An isolated house and an isolated life. A house with a story to tell, could it but speak; a human life with a hidden, untold past. Those were the parallels Hugh Morgan drew between himself and his chosen home, feeling a dreary sort of kinship with it, and

half imagining sometimes that it possessed a human soul, a soul that was as sad in its loneliness as he in his. Here year after year he lived in solitude, devoted apparently to science alone, the man to all outward appearances merged in the antiquarian. His tall figure, surmounted by a broad-brimmed hat drawn low over his capacious brow, became well known to all the inhabitants of the village and the neighbourhood around. Now and then it would be missed for six months or more at a time, when “The Professor,” as he came to be called, long before the title was his in reality, had found occasion to return abroad for scientific purposes. But, as a rule, it was to be met with every day, either pacing thoughtfully beside the wide sea, or passing rapidly across the green waste behind the straggling village, on the way to the mountains beyond.

The years went by. Professor Morgan became a shining light in the world of archaeological science; but each year as it passed seemed to bind him down more and more irrevocably to solitude of heart. The shunning of all companionship, which at first had been but the instinct of a wounded and sensitive spirit, became at length a fixed habit, which he was too shy and reserved to break through. Each year increased the stoop of the Professor's shoulders, the baldness of his head, and the terrific development of his forehead. Each year the sad, shy eyes grew sadder and shyer, and were more and more rarely lifted to meet the undiscerning, unperceptive eyes of others. Little did anyone divine what bitter hours of heart loneliness the misanthropic, unsocial Professor passed in the grim, museum-like study of his lonely house, or what painful thoughts, quite unconnected with barrows and cromlechs and Druid circles, were his daily companions.

One August day the Professor made a journey miles away among the mountains for the purpose of taking fresh observations of a famous cromlech. He had been for two years at work upon a history of cromlechs, and was at this time gathering material for a chapter on the differences between British cromlechs and those of the nations of Germanic descent. The journey took him all the morning, and when he came within sight of the village on his return, the afternoon sun was blazing at its hottest. About a mile and a half from the village the road passed through a rough field, in the midst of which, on a slight elevation, stood the ruins of an ancient British house. To any but an antiquary the house had the appearance of being nothing more than a shapeless heap of stones. The Professor had a theory of his own concerning its origin and history; and intended one day writing a magazine article about it by way of recreation from his laborious and exhaustive work on the cromlechs.

As he drew near the ruin to-day he saw coming towards it, from the direction of the village, in the hot glare of the sun, two tiny figures in black dresses and

His broad-brimmed hat was like their father's, the stoop of his shoulders reminded them of their father too, and his manner invited confidence, so the children accepted his friendly overture and took him at his word.

"Come and look!" cried the younger of the two. She jumped to her feet, and, tripping up to the tall Professor, took his hand.

At the contact of the little, soft, confiding fingers a thrill shot through the Professor. He looked down at the child, and catching the sweet look of the innocent round face, it was most strangely borne in upon him that that sweetness of expression, that heavenly blue of the eyes, and that soft fluffiness of the brown hair on the fair forehead were not unfamiliar. As the child's hand drew him along he held it with a gentle pressure, and a musing expression crept into his sad eyes.

The elder child lifted the yellow cat from the hamper. "There!" she said, "those are Amber's dear little kittens. We brought them here to save their lives, because Gwennie said they would all have to be drowned!"

The Professor bent his back, and peered into the



"TWO TINY FIGURES IN BLACK DRESSES."

white sun-bonnets. Between them they bore a hamper, from which a yellow cat raised its head and gazed around with inquiring eyes. The little faces beneath the sun-bonnets were crimson with heat and haste, and, as soon as they reached the foot of the mound on which the ruin stood, the two little travellers put down their burden, and sank beside it, panting with fatigue. The Professor's interest was transferred from the ruin to the charming picture made by the children and their cat. It was long since he had rested his eyes upon objects so young and fresh, and full of life. His fancy was pleasantly struck with the contrast presented by the ancient ruin and the picture of young life to which it formed a background. His heart stirred, and he stepped nearer to the children, who had been so absorbed in the labour of getting along with their burden that they had not perceived the Professor. Now, as they heard his approaching footsteps, they raised blue, startled eyes towards him, and threw protecting arms across their hamper. The Professor felt irresistibly drawn towards them, and, contrary to his usual custom, spoke.

"I won't hurt your cat," he said.

His voice was gentle, and so were his great grey eyes, which were not too shy to meet the innocent blue ones.

hamper, where a family of blind, groping, three-days-old kittens lay. The Professor did not find them so charming or so interesting as the children. He looked from the kittens to the child hugging the yellow cat, her blue eyes sparkling under her sun-bonnet. Who could these blue-eyed children be? Why should he fancy that they bore a resemblance to a blue-eyed girl whose life had been closely entwined with his own in the hidden past? The Professor put out his disengaged hand, keeping gentle hold of the clinging child with the other, and absently stroked Amber's yellow head. Amber purred approval, and the children's hearts were completely won. They invited the Professor to sit down on the grass with them, and, inwardly amazed and amused at his own unusual proceedings, the Professor did so. The children babbled about their kittens, and he, listening with a rather abstracted smile, turned his eyes ever from one child to the other.

"What is your name, little one?" he asked, abruptly, after a while. The question was addressed to the younger child, who still kept his hand and was leaning confidingly against his arm, looking up with curiosity at the bumps on his broad forehead. She was wondering if they had been caused by a tumble downstairs.



"HUGGING THE YELLOW CAT."

"My name is Phyllis," she said, in answer to his question.

The Professor started as if an electric shock had passed through him, and his face burned suddenly red. From Phyllis's face his eyes travelled to her black crape-trimmed dress.

"Why do you wear this?" he asked, touching it very softly.

"Because mother has gone away from us," said the child, her lips quivering a little. "She has gone to Heaven, and we shall not see her again until we go there, too."

The Professor said no more. He sat silent, looking out with dim eyes across the sunny land. He did not see the fields stretching hot and parched down to the village; he did not see the grand mountains fading away right and left of him into mist. He saw neither the calm sea shimmering out there beyond the village, nor the exquisite sky of turquoise blue smiling like embodied joy above it. He saw a girl named Phyllis whom in the past he had loved with the intensity of a reserved and yet passionate nature. She had seemed to return his love, and to understand him as few understood the sensitive, reticent student. Assured of her love, convinced by many a token that he was the elect out of many suitors, he had left her one year to join an exploration party in Palestine.



"PHYLLIS."

Thither, after a few months' absence, he was followed by news which turned him outwardly to stone, and made his inner life an agony of bitterness and grief. The news was conveyed in a cutting from the *London Times*, sent to him anonymously. It contained the announcement of Phyllis Wynne's marriage with a Colonel Eilewellyn, who had at one time appeared to be a favoured rival for her love, but who had long since ceased to press his suit. A letter in Phyllis's handwriting followed the announcement, but Hugh Morgan tore it to atoms, unread. A second and a third letter shared the same fate. Then the letters ceased. Hugh Morgan remained abroad for a year or two, and on his return buried himself in the obscure corner of Wales in which he had now lived for ten years.

The unmistakable likeness in the faces of these two children, and the fact of one of them bearing the name of his faithless love, set both memory and imagination at work in the mind of the Professor. These were without doubt Phyllis's children. And Phyllis was dead! It was a strange chance that had brought him and Phyllis's children together; strange and sad that from the lips of Phyllis's child he should hear of Phyllis's death.

So out there in the August sunshine, at the foot of the old ruin, the Professor read, as he thought, the last page of the romance of his life. But he was mistaken. There was yet another page to be turned.

Unnoticed by the dreaming Professor or by the children, who, seeing their companion's abstraction, had quietly busied themselves plucking the yellow poppies which grew among the grass, there had come along the road from the village a lady in a black dress. She was close upon them before the children perceived her. With outstretched arms and affectionate outcries they flew to meet her. She caught them to her, and bending down kissed the little uplifted faces with great tenderness.

"My little Kitty and Phyllie!" she cried, "how you have frightened us! Why did you leave Gwennie? Why did you come all this distance alone?"

The Professor, hearing the voice, rose suddenly to his



"THE PROFESSOR ROSE SUDDENLY."

feet. How strangely he was haunted to-day! Surely that was the voice of Phyllis Wynne! And yet Phyllis was dead! His wondering, startled eyes devoured the face of the new-comer, and he held his breath. He saw a woman past her first youth, a woman with blue, sweet eyes, and with brown hair touched too early with grey. In spite of the difference the years had made, in spite of the paleness which had taken the place of the peach-bloom of old, and the smoothness of the hair which

once had curled so softly about the brow, Hugh Morgan could not but recognise her. This was certainly Phyllis. And yet the children had said she was dead!

"Phyllis!" he cried aloud, unable to contain himself, and his voice broke as he spoke the name which had not passed his lips for more than ten years.

At the sound of that name, spoken by that voice, the lady started as the Professor had started when the child Phyllie had pronounced it, and a crimson tide of colour rushed over her pale face. She loosened the clinging arms of the children, and, taking a step towards the Professor, stood with strained eyes staring at him.

"Hugh!" she cried.

Bluntly and confusedly he stammered: "But the child said you were dead!"

The immobility of his face was all broken up with the strength of the conflicting emotions that possessed him, his grey eyes glowed under the prominent brows, and his strong hands trembled. Phyllis was scarcely less moved herself, but, woman-like, seeing his excessive and almost overmastering agitation, she came to the rescue by controlling herself into calmness of voice and manner.

"The children's mother is dead," she said, gently.

"They are not *your* children?" said the Professor, passing a hand over his brow, as if to sweep away the mist of bewilderment that obscured his understanding.

"They are my brother's children," said Phyllis Wynne. "He has just been appointed minister at a Presbyterian church at C——." She named a large town some miles distant. "I have taken care of the children since their mother died a few months ago, and we have come here for a holiday."

"And you—you are widowed, then?" blundered on the Professor.

Phyllis Wynne looked at him strangely.

"I have never been married," she said, simply, and the crimson colour again dyed her delicate face.

The Professor stared at her a moment in horrified amazement, scarcely able to seize the import of her words. Then he broke out in a passionate way, his voice loud and stern:—

"Then what fiend sent me that false notice of your marriage—your marriage with Colonel Llewellyn?"

"Oh, Hugh! Hugh!" cried Phyllis Wynne swiftly, her voice sharp with pain. Through her quick woman's

mind there had flashed the explanation of all that had been so incomprehensible, the realization of all that Hugh as well as she herself had suffered, and with it a contrasting vision of what might have been. "Oh, Hugh! What an awful mistake! My cousin of the same name, Phyllis Wynne, married Colonel Llewellyn!"

"My God!" cried the Professor, "what a fool I was! What a fool!"

A dead silence fell between them. No detailed explanation was necessary just then. Each understood that either through the mistake of some officious meddler, or through the deliberate villainy of some rival of Hugh Morgan's, they had been kept apart through the best years of life, each embittered by the thought of the other's faithlessness. They stood side by side, looking gravely out at the gleaming sea. Their hearts were beating with the same momentous thought, but neither yet dared to give expression to it. The children, gathering their yellow poppies and twining them about their hamper, looked up curiously now and again at their aunt and their new friend, and wondered why their faces were so serious and yet so excited, and why, after talking so earnestly, they had now fallen into complete silence.

The silence could not long be maintained unbroken. It grew too pregnant with strong, struggling emotion. The Professor suddenly turned to the woman by his side.

"Have we met again too late, Phyllis?" he cried. "Is it too late?"

As the question passed his lips, his face grew very white, and his grey eyes filled with an intense and painful eagerness. Phyllis kept him in no suspense. Her answer came at once, in a broken cry of love.

"Oh, Hugh! it is not too late!—it could never have been too late!" And, her blue eyes shining through tears, she stretched out her hands to him.

The wondering children, pausing in their work, saw their Aunt Phyllis gathered to their new friend's heart. She was held there closely, while soft whispered words passed from lip to lip, and a radiance of unspeakable happiness dawned over both faces. The years of suffering and separation seemed compensated for in that one moment of exquisite and perfect joy.

The stones of the old ruin blazing in the August sunshine gazed at the Professor in amazed reproach. But he paid no heed. The archæologist was lost in the lover.



Two Fishers.

From the French of Guy de Maupassant.

[HENRI RÉNÉ ALBERT GUY DE MAUPASSANT was born on the 5th of August in the year 1850. His parents lived in Normandy, and were people of position; but when in 1870 the war broke out with Prussia, Guy, then just twenty, buckled on his sword, and served his country as a common soldier. When the war was over, he became acquainted with Gustave Flaubert, and the brilliant author of "Salammbô" introduced him to the world of letters, in which he quickly won himself a foremost place. He is not a very prolific writer, but the quality of his work is always fine, and he is one of the best writers of short tales now living. He is fond of using his experience of the war as a basis for his stories—of which "Two Fishers" is an excellent example, as well as of his remarkably artistic style, which tells a story in its full effect without a word too much or little.]



THE TWO FISHERS.

PARIS was blockaded—famished—at the point of death. Even the sparrows on the housetops were few and far between, and the very sewers were in danger of becoming depopulated. People ate anything they could get.

Monsieur Morisot, watchmaker by trade, was walking early one bright January morning down the Boulevards, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, feeling hungry and depressed, when he unexpectedly ran against a friend. He recognised Monsieur Sauvage, an old-time chum of the riverside.

Every Sunday before the war Morisot used to start at daybreak with his bamboo fishing-rod in his hand, his tin bait and tackle box upon his back. He used to take the train to Colombes and walk from there to the Island of Maranthe. No sooner had he arrived at the river than he used to begin to fish, and continue fishing until evening. Here every Sunday he used to meet Monsieur

Sauvage, a linendraper from Paris, but stout and jovial withal, as keen a fisherman moreover as he was himself.

Often they would sit side by side, their feet dangling over the water, for half a day at a time and say scarcely a word, yet little by little they became friends. Sometimes they never spoke at all. Occasionally they launched out into conversation, but they understood each other perfectly without its aid, for their tastes and ideas were the same.

One spring morning in the bright sunshine, when the light and delicate mist hovered over the river, and these two mad fishermen enjoyed a foretaste of real summer weather, Morisot would say to his neighbour: "Hein! not bad, eh?"

And Sauvage would reply: "I know nothing to beat it."

This interchange of sentiments was quite enough to engender mutual understanding and esteem.

In autumn, towards evening, when the setting sun

reddened the sky and cast shadows of the fleeting clouds over the water; when the river was decked in purple; when the whole horizon was lighted up and the figures of the two friends were illumined as with fire; when the russet-brown of the trees was lightly tinged with gold, and the trees themselves shivered with a wintry shake, Monsieur Sauvage would smile at Monsieur Morisot and say, "What a sight, eh?"

And Monsieur Morisot, without even raising his eyes from his float, would answer, "Better than the Boulevards, hein!"

This morning, as soon as they had recognised each other they shook hands warmly, quite overcome at meeting again under such different circumstances.

Monsieur Sauvage sighed and murmured, "A nice state of things."

Monsieur Morisot, gloomy and sad, answered, "And what weather! To-day is New Year's Day." The sky, in fact, was clear, bright, and beautiful.

They began to walk along, sorrowful and pensive. Said Morisot, "And our fishing, eh? What times we used to have!"

Sauvage replied, "When shall we have them again?"

They went into a little "café" and had a glass of absinthe, and then started again on their walk.

They stopped at another "café" for another glass. When they came out again they were slightly dazed, like people who had fasted long and then partaken too freely.

It was lovely weather; a soft breeze fanned their faces. Monsieur Sauvage, upon whom the fresh air was beginning to take effect, suddenly said: "Suppose we were to go!"

"Go where?"

"Why, fishing!"

"But where?"

"To our island, of course. The French outposts are at Colombes. I know Colonel Dumoulin; he will let us pass through easily enough."

Morisot trembled with delight at the very idea: "All right, I'm your man."

Soon they had crossed the lines, passed through deserted Colombes, and found themselves in the vineyard leading down to the river. It was about eleven o'clock.

On the other side the village of Argenteuil seemed as if it were dead. The hills of Orgremont and Saumons commanded the whole country round. The great plain stretching out as far as Nanterne was empty as air. Nothing in sight but cherry trees and stretches of grey soil.

Monsieur Sauvage pointed with his finger to the heights above and said, "The Prussians are up there," and a vague sense of uneasiness seized upon the two friends.

The Prussians! They had never set eyes upon them, but for months past they had felt their presence near, encircling their beloved Paris, ruining their beloved France, pillaging, massacring, insatiable, invincible, invisible, all-powerful, and as they thought on them a sort of superstitious terror seemed to mingle with the hate they bore towards their unknown conquerors. Morisot murmured, "Suppose we were to meet them?" and Sauvage replied, with the instinctive gallantry of the Parisian, "Well! we would offer them some of our fish for supper."

All the same they hesitated before venturing into the country, intimidated as they were by the all-pervading silence.

Eventually Monsieur Sauvage plucked up courage: "Come along, let's make a start; but we must be cautious."

They went through the vineyard, bent double, crawling along from bush to bush, ears and eyes upon the alert.

Only one strip of ground lay between them and the river. They began to run, and when they reached the bank they crouched down among the dry reeds for shelter.

Morisot laid his ear to the ground to listen for the sound of footsteps, but he could hear nothing. They were alone, quite alone; gradually they felt reassured and began to fish.



"THEY WENT ON THEIR WAY REJOICING."

They separated to fetch their rods.

An hour afterwards they were walking fast along the high road, towards the town commanded by Colonel Dumoulin. He smiled at their request, but granted it, and they went on their way rejoicing in the possession of the password

The deserted Island of Marante hid them from the opposite shore. The little restaurant was closed, and looked as if it had been neglected for years.

Monsieur Sauvage caught the first gudgeon, Monsieur Morisot the second. And every minute they pulled up their lines with a little silver object dangling and

struggling on the hook. Truly, a miraculous draught of fishes. As the fish were caught they put them in a net which floated in the water at their feet. They positively revelled in enjoyment of a long-forbidden sport. The sun shone warm upon their backs. They heard nothing—they thought of nothing—the rest of the world was as nothing to them. They simply fished.

Suddenly a smothered sound, as it were underground, made the earth tremble. The guns had recommenced firing. Morisot turned his head, and saw above the bank, far away to the left, the vast shadow of Mont Valérien, and over it the white wreath of smoke from the gun which had just been fired. Then a jet of flame burst forth from the fortress in answer, a moment later followed by another explosion. Then others, till every second as it seemed the mountain breathed out death, and the white smoke formed a funeral pall above it.

Monsieur Sauvage shrugged his shoulders. "They are beginning again," he said.

Monsieur Morisot, anxiously watching his float bob up and down, was suddenly seized with rage against the belligerents, and growled out: "How idiotic to kill one another like that."

Monsieur Sauvage: "It's worse than the brute beasts."

Monsieur Morisot, who had just hooked a bleak, said: "And to think that it will always be thus so long as there are such things as Governments."

Monsieur Sauvage stopped him: "The Republic would not have declared war."

Monsieur Morisot in his turn: "With Kings we have foreign wars, with the Republic we have civil wars."

Then in a friendly way they began to discuss politics with the calm common-sense of reasonable and peace-loving men, agreeing on the one point that no one would ever be free. And Mont Valérien thundered unceasingly, demolishing with its cannon-balls French houses, crushing out French lives, ruining many a dream, many a joy, many a hope deferred, wrecking much happiness, and bringing to the hearts of women, girls, and mothers, in France and elsewhere, sorrow and suffering which would never have an end.

"It's life," said Monsieur Morisot.

"Say rather that it's death," said Monsieur Sauvage.

They started, scared out of their lives, as they felt that someone was walking close behind them. Turning round, they saw four men: four tall, bearded men, dressed as servants in livery, and wearing flat caps upon their heads. These men were covering the two fishermen with rifles.

The rods dropped from their frightened hands, and floated aimlessly down the river. In an instant the Frenchmen were seized, bound, thrown into a boat, and ferried over to the island.

Behind the house they had thought uninhabited was a picket of Prussian soldiers. A hairy giant, who was sitting astride a chair, and smoking a porcelain pipe, asked them in excellent French if they had had good sport.

A soldier placed at the feet of the officer the net full of fish, which he had brought away with him.

"Not bad, I see. But we have other fish to fry. Listen, and don't alarm yourselves. You are a couple of French spies sent out to watch my movements, disguised as fishermen. I take you prisoners, and I order you to be shot. You have fallen into my hands—so much the worse for you. It is the fortune of war. Inasmuch, however, as you came through the lines, you are certainly in possession of the password. Otherwise you could not get back again. Give me the word and I will let you go."

The two friends, livid with fear, stood side by side, their hands nervously twitching, but they answered not a word.

The officer continued: "No one need ever know it. You will go home quietly, and your secret will go with you. If you refuse, it is death for you both, and that instantly. Take your choice."

They neither spoke nor moved.

The Prussian calmly pointed to the river and said: "Reflect, in five minutes you will be at the bottom of that water. I suppose you have families?"

Mont Valérien thundered unceasingly.

The two Frenchmen stood perfectly still and silent.

The officer gave an order in German. Then he moved his chair farther away from the prisoners, and a dozen soldiers drew up in line twenty paces off.

"I will give you one minute," he said, "not one second more."

He got up leisurely, and approached the two Frenchmen. He took Morisot by the arm and said, in an undertone: "Quick! Give me the word. Your friend will know nothing. I will appear to give way."

Monsieur Morisot did not answer.

The Prussian took Monsieur Sauvage aside and said the same thing to him.

Monsieur Sauvage did not answer.

They found themselves once more side by side.



"TURNING ROUND THEY SAW FOUR MEN."

TWO FISHERS.

By accident Morisot's glance fell upon the net full of fish on the ground a few steps off. A ray of sunshine lit up their glittering bodies, and a sudden weakness came over him. "Good-bye, Monsieur Sauvage," he whispered.

"Good-bye, Monsieur Morisot," replied Monsieur Sauvage. They pressed each other's hands, trembling from head to foot.

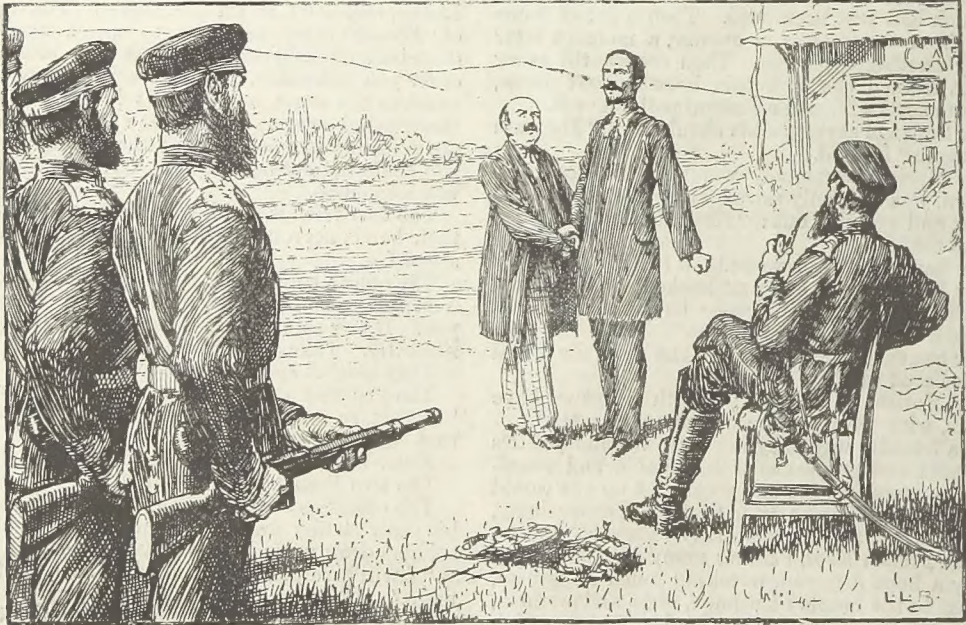
The officer gave another order; the soldiers raised their guns.

tied the stones to the feet of the dead Frenchmen, and carried them down to the river.

Mont Valerien thundered unceasingly.

Two soldiers took Morisot by the head and feet. Two others did the same to Sauvage. The bodies swung to and fro, were launched into space, described a curve, and plunged feet first into the river.

The water bubbled, boiled, then calmed down, and the little wavelets, tinged with red, circled gently towards the bank.



"THEY PRESSED EACH OTHER'S HANDS."

"Fire," said the officer.

Monsieur Sauvage fell dead on his face. Monsieur Morisot, of stronger build, staggered, stumbled, and then fell right across the body of his friend, with his face turned upwards to the sky, his breast riddled with balls.

The Prussian gave another order. His men dispersed for a moment, returning with cords and stones. They

The officer, impassive as ever, said, "It is the fishes' turn now."

His eye fell upon the gudgeon lying on the grass. He picked them up, and called out, "Wilhelm." A soldier in a white cap appeared. He threw the fish towards him.

"Fry these little animals for me at once, while they are still alive and kicking. They will be delicious."

Then he began smoking again.



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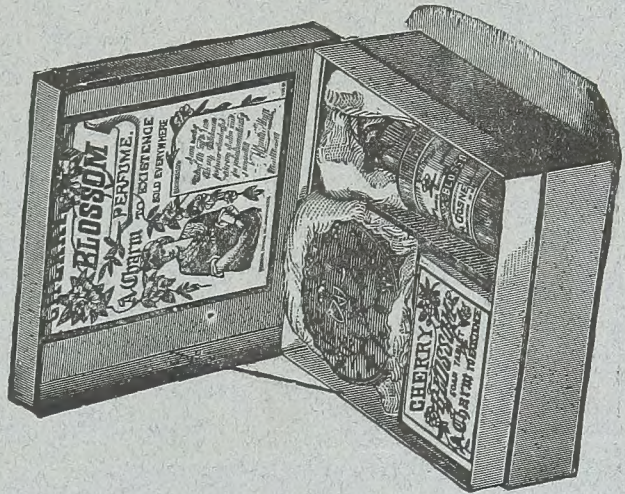
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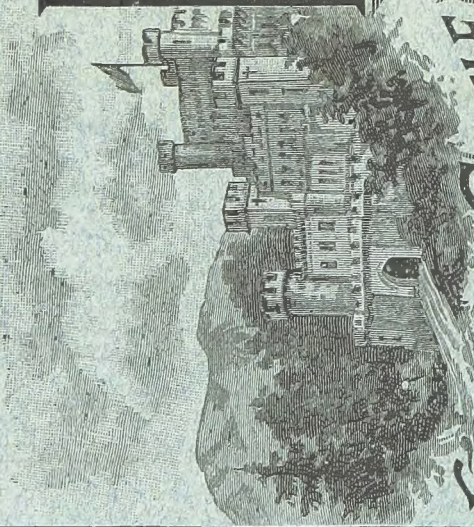
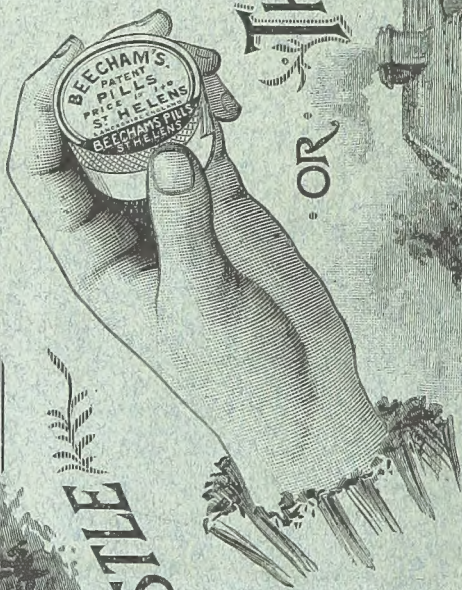
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